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T W O
S E R M O N S

Preached at the
O L D J E W R Y,

On *March* the 22^d. 172⁶₇.

A Day of solemn Fasting and Prayer, with
relation to the present State of the pub-
lick Affairs.

By **J O H N E V A N S,** and
J A B E Z E A R L E.

Published at the Request of the Ministers present.



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MEMORANDUM

FOR THE RECORD

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS

OF THE



IN WITNESS WHEREOF

THE SECRETARY OF THE ADMIRALTY

HAS SIGNED

THESE RECORDS

THIS 10th DAY OF

APRIL 1901

Our hopes of success from God's providence, more than from external means.

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the

OLD JEWRY,

March 22. 172⁶/₇.

By JOHN EVANS.



LONDON:
Printed in the Year 1727.



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 JEREMIAH ix. 23, 24.

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

AT first sight these words may seem rather to relate to particular persons in their private capacities, and with reference to their own private welfare and security, than to concern the publick prosperity of a nation. And indeed the instruction in that view would be very useful and suitable; that it would be the wisdom of every man to rejoyce more in God and his favour than in any outward comforts, and to trust in God rather than in any external means of welfare.

But if we look back into the context, we shall find that this message was delivered with an eye to the *Jewish* nation. The case was this.
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The *Affyrians*, a people well known at that time in the world for their ambitious and oppressive designs, were intended by God as a scourge to his own professing people. The prophet was sent to warn them of it, which he faithfully performed. But instead of taking the warning, and improving the time of God's patience for repentance and reformation, they encouraged themselves with hopes, that they should be able to weather the storm, and to baffle their enemies by their wisdom and might and riches. Therefore, after many threatnings in this chapter, God in the text sets himself to undermine their false confidences, and at the same time directs them to the only good foundation of security. *Thus saith the Lord, &c.*

I think this may be a subject proper for our present meditation. God grant we may be prevailed with to take the wise counsel. The natural method of prosecuting the words may be this.

1. To consider the negative part of the direction, or that which we are cautioned against glorying and confidence in. And then,
2. The positive part, or that upon which we are directed to build our hopes of national security.

I. I begin with the negative part of the direction. *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches.* Where we may briefly take notice of the several particulars mentioned, as apt unduly to be gloried in by a people in time of danger: Then shew, what glorying in them is faulty: And lastly, the folly and vanity of such a glorying in them.

First,

First; We may briefly take notice of the several particulars mentioned, as apt unduly to be gloried in by a people in time of publick danger. *Wisdom, might, and riches.* And under these three things may be comprehended all that in second causes and outward means can furnish out a people to face an enemy with success.

One is *wisdom*. With how promising an aspect doth a nation's peace look, if there is a wise prince at the helm, attended by prudent counsellors? If the direction of publick affairs is in the hands of men of eminent natural abilities and mature experience! of such as are deep in their searches, cool in their deliberations, and steady in their resolutions! of those who have a presence of mind and a ready turn of thought in pressing difficulties! who understand well the interests, the strength and weakness of their own country, and the state and circumstances of their neighbours, with the dangers and advantages to be expected by their country from the several powers around them! If there are many judicious and faithful patriots in the councils of a land, *men understanding in the times, to know what ought to be done* in different conjunctures; or who have *wisdom to discern both time and judgment*: When this is the case of a people, we are ready to form great expectations of publick happiness. Especially if along with this

There is *might or power*. A few wise men are themselves a great strength to a nation, *wisdom being better than strength*. Yet the wisest counsels cannot manage a war without hands to execute them. But if there is this advantage too, a populous country, regular troops, a powerful navy, strong alliances, brave commanders, a courageous people resolute to defend their interests:

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If there is thus *wisdom and strength for war*, things appear very promising. Especially if withal,

There are *riches*, which we usually call the sinews of war. The wisest counsels may be of no effect for want of these. Poverty sinks courage, and strength for war is not to be maintained without supplies. But if there is plenty in a nation, and large funds in readiness; we are very prone to conclude, that our wise men will not think in vain, that our neighbours will be obliged to take our measures, and that we may maintain our ground against all opposition.

When there is an union of such promising circumstances as these, who is not ready to say, *happy is the people that is in such a case?* Especially if we apprehend ourselves superior in any or all of these things to those with whom we are at variance. I go on to shew,

Secondly, What glorying in these things is faulty.

I might observe, that we sinfully glory in them, if we ascribe past security or successes to these second causes, more than to the first, or to the favour of God in granting such means of advantage to us, and rendering them serviceable as far as they have been so. And if this hath been our frame and temper, it should make a part of our humiliation this day.

But the glorying spoken of in the text, relates rather to our future welfare than to our past; and the design is to warn us against undue confidence in these things for future security.

And as to this, it is certain that we are not forbidden to have any expectation from these things. When counsellors cease, when armies faint and their spirits fail, when people are abandoned by their allies, or their riches are ex-

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hausted; at such a time without doubt there is an allowable fear and even a dutiful concern; because, as God usually works by means, if probable means are withdrawn, this is ordinarily to be reputed a sign of judgments impending. So on the other hand, when we see men of eminent furniture and prudence raised up, and other things looking fair upon a nation, it is a good symptom that God hath blessings in store for it. Consequently, when God in his providence hath made such provision for our welfare, to hope for some good effect of it, is a rational and christian expectation, as long as we eye God in all.

That which is faulty then, is only to place our *main* hope and trust in these things, *without a due regard to God*. And we shall justly be chargeable with such criminal glorying in them, if we do either of these two things.

1. If we expect security and success from them, while we have reason from more certain indications to apprehend that God is against us: If these advantages encourage us to reckon ourselves safe without any more ado, that *our mountain is so strong, that we cannot be moved*; as if they set us out of the reach of divine strokes, and made us to be as gods ourselves. Such an use the arrogant prince of Tyre made of them. *Ezek. xxviii. 2, &c. Thine heart, saith God, is lifted up; and thou hast said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; and therefore rich by trade and merchandize, and better fortified, as he thought, against the assaults of enemies. Thou settest thine heart as the heart of God; art grown bold and assuming, as if thou wast under no superior power. Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; thinkest thy self furnished with the wisest*

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counsels:

counsels: *There is no secret they can hide from thee;* thou imaginest, that thou hast such sagacious counsellors or such universal correspondence, that thou art able to see to the bottom of every thing. *With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and gold and silver into thy treasure. By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thy heart is lifted up because of thy riches.* God grant, that our large share of the like advantages, may never prove the occasion of our becoming such practical atheists. To become fearless of God's judgments, as if such arms of flesh could exempt us from punishment tho' God should be against us, is indeed directly to set them up against God. You may say, who beside atheists can be charged with this? I answer; if we are more solicitous to obtain or continue these outward supports, than to be such to whom God hath promised his favour, we are really guilty of this. When God hath assured us, that *there is no peace to the wicked, that if we forsake him, he will forsake us;* if we take no care for removing the accursed things that are provocations to God, yet promise ourselves safety from our wisdom and strength and riches; it is plain that we make them our bulwarks against God.

2. If we expect any more from these things than God shall make them to be to us, we glory unduly in them. In the former way we shall glory in them *in opposition to God;* and in this *without him.* We should stedfastly believe, and be influenced by it as a principle in every thing, that nothing can befriend or prejudice us farther than God makes it to do either. We

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are not disallowed, as hath been said, to expect deliverance from men and means as instruments under God, and to rejoice in them as comfortable tokens of his favourable designs towards us. But we must carry him along with us in all our expectations, and wait for the benefit as more his than theirs. Every step to which we carry our trust and hope from them farther than in subservience to God, is idolatry; for so far we regard them as independent creatures. If we are brought to expect all from them, only as in the hands of God, this will moderate our expectations from them; because divine promises are not so absolute for temporal blessings as for spiritual and eternal, which should accordingly qualify our hopes of the former. And in fact we see God in his providence often crossing the best concerted measures; which should prevent our being positive in expectations of success, even when appearances are fairest. In short, we are not to expect that wisdom or power or wealth will be our saviours or protectors, farther than in the use of them God's favour shall compass us about as a shield. If we glory in them beyond this, *our glorying is not good.*

Thirdly, I am yet to shew the vanity and folly of this faulty glorying in the external means of security: And for that purpose would suggest two considerations.

1. They deserve not that such a stress should be laid upon them, because of their uncertainty. It hath been the observation of every age and every nation, that the greatest power, the wisest counsels, and the most regular management have sometimes proved ineffectual for a

people's security. Some have called this fortune, but we are taught to ascribe it to an overruling sovereign providence. As long as we believe a God, upon whom all things depend, and whose measures are too deep for us to reach; it must be unfit for us to conclude a certainty of events meerly from probable causes. The wisest of kings, who had made the largest experiments and most judicious reflections upon human affairs, made this observation, *Eccl. ix. 11. I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, i. e. not always, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill: but time and chance happen to them all; i. e. events of providence which were unforeseen and unsuitable to promising appearances.* And another king tells us, *Psal. xxxiii. 16, 17. No king is saved by the multitude of an host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great strength.* And certainly, if we will but pause a little, and think of the methods which providence hath often taken to defeat all these advantages, and that the all-wise God can easily take many more; the uncertainty of these external confidences will convincingly appear.

As to *wisdom*; by how many waies may the superior wisdom of God frustrate all human policy! He can *take the wise in their own craftiness*; send foolishness or division into the counsels of a people, and *make the stay of their tribes to become fools*, as he did to the princes of *Egypt*, *Isa. xix. 13.* How often have princes been infatuated to reject the counsel of the prudent, when

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it hath been even as an oracle of God, for the most unseasonable and pernicious counsels ! As *Absalom* preferred the advice of *Hushai* to that of *Achitophel*, and *Rehoboam* the mad suggestions of some young courtiers before the prudent and just hints of his father's counsellors. Whenever this becomes the case, what would the wisest contrivance signify ? Besides how many sudden accidents may prove the turn of a kingdom which the subtlest heads could not foresee ! An odd incident may unexpectedly baffle the best measures, which the most consummate human prudence can neither prevent nor provide against. Or, in the midst of a danger the wisest heads may be taken off by death as soon as the vulgar, and their thoughts perish with them.

Then for *power* : Suppose ourselves to be in the best posture of defence against an enemy ; yet, beside extraordinary appearances of providence at some times to break in upon all those fences, many little casualties have fallen out in every age, almost in every war, to shew the uncertainty of human power. The chances of war are a common proverb ; which cannot absolutely be foreseen by any but the Lord of hosts, who hath the supreme direction of them. Armies, that seemed sure of victory, have been taken at a surprize and defeated. Those, who have conquered in one battle, have been triumphed over in another. Fatal sicknesses have swept away the bravest soldiers or seamen. A navy victorious in fight may be conquered by the waves, and shipwreck'd in a storm. Allies have changed sides, and been turned against their old friends by some new interests advanced on the other side. A soldiery may be corrupted, or
become

become careless of a nation's defence. The courageous may be dispirited by an unaccountable, unlook'd for turn, and the men of might not be able to find their hands. A people, who by their union and accord seemed almost invincible by any human power, have ruined one another by their divisions, and made the whole community a prey to the common enemy.

And lastly, for the *riches* and plenty of a nation, how easily may trade be interrupted, and riches exhausted, which must maintain both armies and navies! Or, God by unkindly seasons may send a scarcity of necessary provisions, without which even money will be of little use for a people's defence.

None, I dare say, will imagine, that I offer these things, as one who is without pleasure in seeing the present flourishing state of our nation, or without hope that God will yet continue it. But I think my self bound in conscience, upon such an occasion as this, to put you in mind of the possibility of a change; that none may venture to set up our wisdom or power or wealth in the place of God; and that when we are putting on the harness, we may not boast as if we had put it off; but ever maintain a sense becoming short-sighted creatures of the uncertainty of future events.

2. Undue glorying in the outward means of safety is the direct way to hinder their instrumental usefulness, and to provoke God to blast them. They may be very serviceable, and answer their promising appearance, if they are only relied upon under God. But we ourselves may disable them to do us service, by giving them more than their due: It may justly then

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be feared, that God should withdraw his blessing; without which our governors, our fleets, our armies, our allies will labour in the fire for very vanity. One of the chief ends of God in counter-acting so frequently the promising tendency of visible means, and in ordering events so different from human measures and expectations, is, that his own providential interposal may be the more regarded, and that men may be cured of making a greater account of these things than they deserve. As God ordered things in this manner in the first planting of the gospel, so he frequently doth the same in his other providential dispensations; and on the same design. *1 Corinth. i. 27, 28, 29. He chuseth the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty: And base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; That no flesh should glory in his presence.* He is prosecuting this design, as invariably resolved that he will not give his glory to another. If we would not then be among the troublers of our *Israel*; if we would not contribute to clog the wheels of publick affairs; if we heartily desire, (as I verily believe we all do,) that the prudent measures of our councils may take effect, that the brave attempts of our fleets and forces may succeed to the nation's glory and lasting interest: Let us by no means allow them God's room in our confidence, but principally glory in him. Which leads me

II. To the positive part of the direction in the text, or that upon which we are taught to build

build our hopes of national security, ver. 24.
But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. Q. D. ' I have warned you ' against a vain boasting in things which cannot ' safely be depended upon: But my design is not ' to extinguish your hope, as if your condition ' was desperate. If you are but careful to understand and know me, I am one in whom ' you may place a firm confidence. '

God by his prophet leads them from building their hope upon the sand, to a sure rock for supporting their trust. And the subject of glorying which he recommends, consists of two parts: Something to be taken care of in themselves, that *they understood and knew God*: And something concerning God, which, when they knew him, might give them full support and satisfaction; That *he is the Lord, which exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth, and delighteth therein.* I chuse to begin with the latter.

First, I would consider the account which God gives of himself, and which represents him as the fittest object of our trust and confidence. We are directed to eye God's providential government of the world, both in the sovereignty of it, and in the manner of its administration.

1. The *Sovereignty* of his government is intimated in the expression, *That I am the Lord.* God, who made the world, is the great king of it. Angels, men and devils, with all other beings in heaven or earth, are subject to him, and act in a subordination to him, whether they

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think of him or not, whether they chuse to do so or not. He is the author of all events, so that no evil, of punishment, happens to a city, but he doth it. *Tho' many devices are in men's hearts, yet his counsel shall stand.* Nothing comes to pass by chance, nothing in vain in the scheme of providence. The actions, which seem to us most casual, are managed by a steady hand of God. Even when *the lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord.* Prov. xvi. 33. *The heart of kings, on which so much depends to mankind, is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will, as easily as the heart of the meanest man breathing.* Prov. xxi. 1. Nothing can come to pass without his permission, or go beyond the bounds he sets. None are too strong for him to conquer, and no case too desperate for him to retrieve. The meanest things are not below his care, nor the greatest above his reach. *A sparrow falleth not to the ground without him, and yet he is the governor among the nations.*

2. The manner of his administering his universal empire, or the rules and measures by which he acts, are expressed here. He is the Lord, *that exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, and delighteth in these things.* Tho' it is undoubtedly true, that *whatsoever the Lord pleaseth, that doth he in heaven and in earth and all deep places;* yet it is as true, that he never is pleased to do any thing disagreeable to his blessed perfections. *He exerciseth, and delighteth in exercising loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth.*

He exerciseth *loving-kindness.* His tender mercies are over all his works. And this very naturally goes before *judgment* in the description;

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because loving-kindness is the direct result of the benignity of his nature, who *is love* ; the other is only a becoming change of his dispensations, in consequence of the badness of his creatures. His goodness hath been signally displayed in the work of creation ; and is still constantly manifested in the course of his providence, in providing for the necessitous, in supporting the weak, in relieving the oppressed, in countenancing ordinarily the measures concerted for the common good of mankind, and in dispensing his benefits more or less to all. Yet,

He also exerciseth *judgment*. *He sometimes fitly maketh himself known by the judgments which he executeth.* Tho' he is slow to anger, and of great kindness ; yet he hath wrath in store for those whom his loving-kindness leadeth not to repentance. None of the proudest oppressors of mankind, nor the strongest combination of earthly potentates against the interests and tranquillity of their neighbours, are beyond his power to reach and check ; and he delights to glorify himself in humbling and abasing such.

And both in acts of *loving-kindness* and *judgment* he exerciseth *righteousness*. He acts by measures of unblemished justice and equity. If from our ignorance of all the reasons of his conduct we may at some times think, that we have room to plead with him concerning his judgments ; yet this is a principle we may be sure of in the general, and should ever prefix to our plea, as the prophet does, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee.* Jer. xii. 1. For *shall not the judge of all the earth do right ?*

Now this view of God shews, how much fitter he is to be relied upon than any arm of flesh. He, who is the absolute sovereign of all,

hath an infinite capacity for the management of so wide an empire ; and at the same time proceeds by such steady and becoming rules, as must make his subjects happy. How happy, compared with others, is a people under the government of an earthly sovereign, who resembles in some measure this character of the blessed God ! A wise and powerful prince, who governs not tyrannically, but observes the rules of princely virtue towards his subjects ! Who makes it evident, that goodness and clemency are his delight, and yet is not remiss in the restraint and punishment of bold offenders, and exerciseth impartial justice without respect of persons ! Such humane rulers are justly esteemed *ministers of God* to any people *for good*. But the best copies come not up to the great original. The blessed God hath an absolute power, such as is not fit to be trusted with any ruler subject to human passions ; but he exerciseth it according to his own perfections. Therefore since *the Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice ; let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof.* Psal. xcvi. 1.

Yet this general character of God, however excellent in it self, will not suffice alone to give a people just expectation of security and blessings. Something farther is necessary in themselves, that they may be able to appropriate the comfort of divine government ; namely,

Secondly, That we understand and know him.

I cannot think, that we are to take this for the bare notional knowledge of the account given us here concerning God. That indeed will shew enough to minister the greatest comfort to those who are upon good terms with him : But it will not give any particular people ground

of confidence in their own case, unless they are the willing subjects of this great Lord of all.

Nor will a bare acquaintance with his will, or the having his worship and ordinances and visible church among us, which sometimes in scripture is the meaning of *knowing God*, make us secure of divine protection. God's return to Israel upon such a pretence may sink a confidence which hath no better foundation. *Hos. viii. 2, 3. Israel shall cry unto me, my God, we know thee.* 'We have thy true worship and institutions among us, we are thy peculiar people, 'so as the heathen world cannot justly plead.' Would that secure them? It follows; *Israel hath cast off the thing that is good; the enemy shall pursue him.* It is a great privilege indeed to know God in this sense; but if this be all, it will aggravate provocations, and may end in sorer ruin. The cry of *the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord*, will not always save a people.

In this *understanding and knowing of God* I think two things may be comprehended.

1. A practical knowledge of him; or an acknowledgment of him, and conformity to him according to these discoveries he hath made of himself. The scriptures represent them as not knowing God, who are not influenced to dutiful regard and resemblance by what they know. If then we know him to be *the Lord*, it is expected that we take him for *our Lord*, and do *the things that he saith*. *Luk. vi. 46.* If we understand him as *exercising loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness*, and that he *delights in these* as his own acts; we may be sure, that he delights also in our exercise of the same moral perfections. Because he is himself a holy God, he can-

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not take pleasure in wickedness, where-ever he sees it. *Psal. v. 4.* It must therefore concern a people, who would secure his favour, to meet him in the exercise of the same things, as they are in capacity for it ; in returns of love to him and to his interest, and in all acts of love one to another, of charity to the necessitous, and benevolence to all. They should be careful, that judgment and justice may run down their streets as a mighty stream ; that vice may be discountenanced, and the provocations of crying sins removed : That the oppressed be relieved, and justice maintained in all their commerce and concern among themselves. Or in other words, to understand and know this God, so as to have reason for enlarged expectations from him, is to be excited by that knowledge to *do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.* In a word, when religion and virtue flourish among a people, in which God delights, then they may hope that he will delight in them to do them good.

2. The firm belief and frequent consideration of the divine government by such a people, is necessary to support their hope. Such a people may and ought to look upon the divine government, as having a comfortable aspect upon them. They may hope to share in the fruits of his loving-kindness ; and that his judgments shall rather be to their enemies and to them that hate them. No threatening of judgment is made to any nation but for eminent offences ; and room is ordinarily left for mercy upon repentance and reformation. And tho' a reforming people cannot appeal to strict justice in any controversy between God and them, any more than private persons ;

persons ; but must say, *Enter not into judgment with us* : Yet in any controversy between them and unrighteous adversaries, such a people may make their appeal to a righteous God. *Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness*, or the patron of my righteous cause. *Psal. iv. 1.*

The time allowed me will admit of but a few words of Application.

1. Let us take the caution given, and not venture to place our main confidence in the outward provisions, with which we are furnished at this juncture for the publick security. I must confess it hath been to me an occasion of some fear, that from the observations I have been able to make, there seems a disposition prevailing more than ordinary at this time, in most one shall converse with, to lay the stress of their hope for good success on external means of defence, and to take no notice of any thing farther. We have without doubt, and praised be God for it, a wise and steady Prince ; prudent measures have been taken for our safety ; there is an unusual vigour and harmony in our Parliament ; we have noble fleets and strong alliances ; supplies are chearfully raised, and a peculiar spirit appears in the body of the people. We may justly rejoice in all this, as a good omen of a happy success of present commotions in *Europe* ; if we provoke not God to baffle all by leaving him out of the account, or by depending more on these things than upon his favour. Let us not be so unkind to ourselves and to our country, such enemies to the success of our counsels or enterprizes, as we are like to be, if we set them in the seat of God.

2. Let

2. Let it be our principal concern to secure the divine favour and loving-kindness in our present circumstances. This, I hope, is the hearty desire and design of the numerous assembly which is voluntarily met here this day to make a solemn application to God with one consent, for his continued blessing on our gracious Sovereign, in his Person, his Family and his Counsels ; for the welfare of our country, and for a happy issue of the present contests and commotions in the several parts of *Europe*. Your appearance in this religious exercise upon such an occasion, seems to express your dependence upon God ; and that you cannot allow yourselves to trust either in the wisest human counsels, or the strongest fleets and armies, or all the wealth of a flourishing nation, without God's favour.

What then can we in our private capacities contribute to the securing of that favour ?

Certainly every one of us should have it first in our concern, that we know God savingly ourselves. *The prayers of men who are themselves truly good and righteous men*, will be of most avail for the publick, as well as in their own particular cases.

Next to this ; Humiliation for *our* own sins, and a personal reformation of every thing amiss in ourselves, may be of beneficial influence to the welfare of the community. Then *our* sins will no longer remain upon account to add to the heap of common guilt.

We should also heartily *mourn for the abominations done in the land* ; seriously confess them before God, acknowledge the desert of them, and deprecate his just displeasure for them : And in our several stations do our utmost to lift up a standard

standard against publick vices, and to promote the reformation of our manners.

And along with all, we should in humility and fervency represent our case to God in prayer. We have indeed the greatest reason for confusion of face upon the view of our national sins, when we compare them with the things in which God in the text is said to delight. Yet it may be some encouragement in our prayers to recollect the cause in which we are engaged, if the war begun should become general. Sure it is a cause pleasing to the great Governor of the world: In maintenance of the peace and liberties of mankind, against those who would disturb the general tranquillity: In defence of those advantages to ourselves, which justice confirms to us as our right upon the faith of solemn treaties: And for the protection of all our civil and religious privileges, against new contrivances to reduce us to popery and slavery. A gracious God by a train of wonders hath secured these invaluable interests to a sinful people hitherto. And tho' we cannot be certain that he will always grant us the same protection; yet let us continue instant in prayer, when new dangers threaten. Who knows but God will yet spare us for his name and his mercy's sake!



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*Divine Mercy, and not our righte-
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for the Nation.*

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As the preceding

S E R M O N

Preached at the

O L D J E W R Y,

March 22. 172⁶₇.

By *J A B E Z E A R L E.*



L O N D O N :

Printed in the Year 1727.



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DANIEL ix. ~~1~~ 8.

For we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies.

THE occasion, connexion, and criticism of these words my design will not allow me to consider particularly. I shall only observe in general, that the time of the *Jewish* nation's deliverance from their long captivity being at hand, as *Daniel* understood by the written prophecy of *Jeremiah*, he separated a proportion of time for extraordinary and solemn addresses to God in behalf of his people. He, no doubt, did not forget *Jerusalem* in his stat- ed and ordinary prayers, which his constant custom was to make three times a day with his chamber-windows open towards the holy city, *chap. vi. 10.* But over and above the notice he took of the publick in the regular course of his private devotions, he piously and wisely thought it proper to represent the case of his country before the God of *Israel*, in a manner suitable to the extraordinary impressions which a more close consideration of the circumstances had made upon his mind: As it is, *ver. 3.* *He set his face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth and ashes.* He kept a day of solemn humiliation; and, considering

dering his rank and arduous employments, as well as advanc'd age, his practice stands upon record as a shining example. It is not beneath a prime minister, nor his prince neither, to fast and *pray* and *make his confession* before the *Lord, the great and dreadful God*. ver. 4. who can, when he pleases, *pour contempt upon princes, put down one, and set up another*. And, I suppose, men of lower degree will hardly think themselves exempted, tho' their temporal concern in the publick is not so great, and the necessary avocations of some of them may be more. Every member of the community ought in proper methods, as providence gives opportunity, to express his concern for its prosperity. Especially, when the advantage of joining with others is offered by public authority, or private consent. The men of *Niniveh* will rise up in judgment against such, as ridicule or neglect solemn applications to God in cases of danger: for they *proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them, even to the least of them*: Majesty itself not excepted. *Jonah* iii. 5, 6.

But waving this and other just remarks, which might be made on this occasion, I shall at this time confine my self to the consideration of that part of *Daniel's* prayer, which you have in the text; and propose it as a general *Observation*. *That in our supplications and intercessions for the publick, we are not to lay the stress of our plea upon our own righteousness but God's mercy*.

To the confirmation of this truth I shall premise a few concessions, which may prevent some objections that might possibly arise in their minds.

1. It may be pleaded, that there are a number

ber of righteous persons in the community. This is supposed as having some weight in it, by *Abraham's* urging, and God's allowing it in the case of *Sodom*. Gen. xviii. 23, &c. We may humbly alledge in arrest of judgment, that there are among us some that *desire to fear the name of the Lord*, as *Nehemiah* speaks, chap. i. 11. This may be fairly inferred from that of *Isa.* lxxv. 8. *Thus saith the Lord; as the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants sakes, that I may not destroy them all.* It is true, God may righteously over-rule this plea, and as it is expressed, *Ezek.* xxi. 3. *draw forth his sword out of its sheath, and cut off from us the righteous and the wicked;* Yet this may be used with God as an argument, while we own that it is mere mercy that admits its prevalence.

2. It may also be pleaded, that God hath encouraged the fervent prayers of the righteous. Thus *St. James* has told us, that *the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much.* chap. v. 16. and confirms it in an instance of a publick nature, viz. rain and a fruitful season being given at the prayer of *Elias*, tho' he was a man subject to like passions as we are, ver. 17. God would have destroyed the *Israelites*, had not *Moses* his chosen stood before him in the breach to turn away his wrath, &c. *Psal.* cvi. 23, &c. And to this purpose is that of *Ezek.* xxii. 30. *I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none.* And tho' this plea may not be admitted by a righteous God, and he may say, as *Ezek.* xiv. 14. *Tho' these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job*

Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, &c. and consequently the deliverance would be mere mercy; yet it is an argument we may use, and which hath often prevailed.

3. We may farther urge, that we are a professing people, are called by the name of God, are a nation of saints, in the sense of that text, *Psal. 1. 5. Gather my saints together, &c.* Thus *Daniel* pleads in behalf of the *Jews*, but very consistently with himself, when he lays the stress upon God's great mercies. For every one sees this argument may be justly over-ruled; as it was in the case of that people, and turned against them too. For so says the great God, *Amos iii. 2. You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.* See to this purpose, *Isa. i. 13, &c.* Wherefore in this case it is mercy, and not merit, to which we are obliged. He does it, as ver. 19. *for his own sake.*

4. Once more; we may represent the justice of our cause, wherever there is room for it. This we find often done in scripture; and oftentimes it hath its weight. But when it hath, it is mercy in the great judge. For however we may deserve from others, we certainly deserve ill from him, and he is at liberty to punish our offences against himself by the unjust violence of others. When the other tribes went out against *Benjamin*, tho' their cause was good, they were defeated twice, with the loss of 40000 men, *Judg. xx. 21, 25.* And in reference to their foreign enemies, when they were oppress'd and led captive, they had commonly, if not universally, right on their side; and were sold into the

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the hands of the heathen, because they rebelled against the God of their fathers, and dealt deceitfully in his covenant. And if I should say the same of their final destruction by *Vespasian* and *Titus*, could it be proved that the *Romans* cause was just, who had no more right to their country than what superior power gave them?

But whenever these or other things I might mention are pleaded, the stress still must be laid upon mercy; for strict and rigorous justice would not admit them as valid arguments in the case. God hath always a right to punish a sinful people; and whenever he doth it not, it is mercy, with whatever arguments he may allow us to fill our mouths, when we, who are but dust and ashes, take upon us to speak in the case.

By these concessions, designed to anticipate objections, I am led into the direct proof of the matter propos'd. The truth I would establish depends in short upon two things, and one is a principle not to be disputed; the other a matter of fact not to be contested.

1. The principle is, that God has a right to punish a sinful people. Need I prove this?

2. The fact is, that all are sinners; that there is no man perfectly innocent, much less any community blameless. Can this be denied?

Thus all merit, properly speaking, stands at once excluded in the judgment of all sober men; except that which I am sure we shall not plead, I mean the desert of our sins.

But because it may be alledged, that tho' all are guilty before God, communities as well as single persons, and so God must be *justified when he judges, and clear when he condemns*; yet the righteousness of a nation is an equitable plea, by
 virtue

vertue of his promise, as appears from *Lev. xxvi.* and *Deut. xxviii.* and indeed the whole current of scripture, and course of providence: I shall take the matter in this light under closer consideration. I admit, that according to the merciful declarations made in scripture, national blessings may be expected by a vertuous people, and even by a wicked one too upon a national repentance. I allow too, that this may be pleaded: And yet suppose it will be granted me still, that even in such a case the stricts must be laid upon mercy, not merit. But in the case of a people, who have pretensions neither to innocence nor to reformation, even this allegation must be given up. And such I shall shew was the case of that nation, for whom this prophet fasted and prayed; and leave you to judge, as I go along, whether our own case be so different as to make the choice of my text improper upon this solemn occasion.* And here observe,

1. They were not duly humbled for the sins of their fathers: Which is a circumstance essential to the sincerity of a national repentance. This appears from their whole conduct. And therefore God might in all equity visit their iniquities upon their posterity to the 3d and 4th generation; and they could with no propriety expostulate according to their common proverb *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the childrens teeth are set on edge.* Ezek. xviii. 2. The promise of God in this case, is upon condition that the son which seeth his father's sins, considereth, and doth not such like, ver. 14. *that the generation to come forget not the works of God, but keep his commandments, and not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation,* &c. Psal. lxxviii.

lxxviii. 7, 8. If by any evidence, and this especially, it appears that men are not humbled for their fathers sins, they not only have no just plea, but no equitable pretence to the favour of God. This was the case of the *Jews*, upon which account *Daniel* here confesses the iniquity of their fore-fathers, which was not yet purged away: And therefore the people, after their return out of captivity, are represented as *confessing their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers*, Nehem. ix. 2. See *Psal.* lxix. 8. composed in the captivity.

2. There was a general corruption of manners amongst them. Not only some few unsound members in the society, but the infection was spread prodigiously; *the godly man ceased, and the faithful failed: They were a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers*, in *Isaiah's* time: and it seems they were not much mended by their long captivity, (except only in the matter of idolatry.) *All Israel*, saith the prophet, *have transgressed thy law*, ver. 11. And when *Nehemiah* set heartily about the work of reformation; what a vast field he had, appears from his own account of that matter. Of this we have abundant evidence in the prophecies, which were uttered about the time of their restoration by *Haggai* and *Zechariah*; with whom *Malachi* seems to have been cotemporary, tho' his prophecy is of something later date. They are called upon to *consider their ways*; *Hag.* i. 3. represented as an *unclean people and nation*, chap. ii. 14. and as *not having turned to the Lord*, ver. 17. And *Zechariah* charges them with *not having at all fasted to God*, while they kept solemn days of humiliation in their exile; and calls upon them to re-

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form, *chap. vii. 5, 9.* And *Malachi* carries the charge still higher, *chap. iii. 14.* *Ye have said, it is vain to serve God.*

3. Even the princes and priests, who should have reformed others, were notoriously vicious themselves. Not but that there were some pious among them, as well as among the people; but the priests especially were, it seems, generally corrupt, at least a great number of them. For this see the prophesy of *Malachi*, ii. 1.—9. See also *Jer. xxix.* in which is a letter sent by him to the captives at *Babylon*.

4. There were very great and heinous sins found among them. Sins, which are peculiarly provoking, and for which God often visits a community; particularly extortion, oppression, and other instances of cruelty; which are as unnatural crimes, as some others which we commonly call so. See *Nehemiah v. 1, &c.* and *Zech. vii. 9, 10.* See also a most barbarous action related in *Jerem. xli. 1, 2, &c.*

5. Their sins were exceedingly aggravated by the great patience and forbearance God had exercised, and the variety of methods he had used to reform them. God had done great things for their fathers; he had sent sore afflictions upon them, and wrought wonderful deliverances for them; and yet after all they were unreclaimed, and even in their captivity continued obstinate; as *ver. 13.* *All this is come upon us; yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.* For all this (like their fathers of old) they sinned still. And when they were restored to their country, they were still the same, and some restraint being off, it should seem worse. Neither

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mercies nor judgments prevailed. They had every motive to repentance, and sufficient space for it, but repented not.

6. To all this they added a great contempt of the messengers whom God sent to reform them. Before they were carried into captivity, this circumstance filled up the measure of their sin. *They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets,* 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. And this spirit remained after the sad event. This appears from their conduct towards *Jeremiah*, chap. xxix. 27. and xlv. 15. And this profane and obstinate spirit shew'd it self after their return to their own land. In spite of the messages God sent them by his prophets, they were even backward in the work of rebuilding that temple they so much gloried in. *Hag.* i. 2, 4, &c. *Zech.* vii. 7. And *Malachi*, chap. iii. 8. charges them with *robbing God, even the whole nation.*

I might have mentioned a great many other particulars; but what I have said is sufficient to illustrate the proposition; and to shew the reason of *Daniel's* manner of praying for the *Jews*, and how proper his example is to direct in like cases. I own our case is not exactly parallel; but perhaps the difference is to our disadvantage.

Have we been duly humbled for the sins of our fathers? Is there sufficient evidence given, that the nation repents of the discouragement which laws once gave to a farther reformation? Ruining men for conscience sake, and putting them under a necessity of profaning the most solemn ordinances for a livelihood? Are there none of the statutes of *Omri* unrepealed? and is there no publick encouragement given to that malignant

spirit against the power of godliness, and the professors of serious religion ; the rampancy of which spirit was in the days of our forefathers so notorious ?

I will not say how things stand in this respect : But can it be deny'd, that our manners are generally dissolute ? That luxury and the sinful methods of supporting it have overspread the land ? That pride, envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, lying, backbiting, and slander, enter into the character of the generality even of professed christians ? And that the worship of God is little regarded, his sabbaths violated, and his ordinances profaned ?

And are even our princes or great men, and priests free from this common guilt ? As to the former, I only ask the question : But as to the latter, how notorious is the defection of many of them from primitive strictness, zeal and charity ! This we confess ourselves, and often hear of it from others ; and chiefly from those, to whom it is not matter of grief, but of wicked pleasure.

Are there not also great sins amongst us ? *Scarlet* and *crimson* sins, as the prophet *Isaiah's* expression is. To say nothing of unnatural lusts, for which we have of late had so many publick examples made, and yet the infection seems to spread. For all our boasted good nature, is not cruelty in rigorous exactions, oppressing the poor, and grinding the face of the needy, and swallowing up families, by oppressive and fraudulent acts, notoriously common with us ? And is not this fit to be mentioned on such a day as this ? For to use the words of the prophet, *Isa. lvi. 6. Is not this the fast that I have chosen ? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens,*
to

to let the oppressed go free? I cannot help taking notice of the abominable sin of perjury, and how men in every station of life seem to regard an oath but as an idle word; and so we need not wonder, that profane swearing and cursing are so common in every corner of the street.

And are not our sins aggravated by the long-suffering of God in the use of all means to reclaim us? We keep days indeed in remembrance of some particular judgments and mercies; but what proficiency have we made in reformation! Wars, and fires, and pestilence, and scarcity have not humbled us: And we have made an unsuitable return for deliverances. God kept out popery and slavery and utter ruin, by the revolution under the conduct of glorious King *William*; and he prevented the return of those miseries by setting King *George* upon the throne, and defeating the plots hitherto of his and our restless and implacable enemies. And while some are weary of their happiness, and would return to *Babylon*, which the *Jews* themselves never desired, (tho' their fathers *in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage*;) others are not by the goodness of God led to repentance; but too generally act as they who practically said, *we are delivered to do all these abominations*, Jer. vii. 10. Not long since we were justly apprehensive of the plague, which made dreadful havock in a neighbouring country: God heard our prayers, and wonderfully preserv'd us. But are we yet reformed?

And are not methods for reformation under great contempt, at least great discouragements? What ministers do, is the jest of fools; and a strong atheistical crew make a mock of them
and

and all their administrations : And the house and ordinances of God have not with such the thousandth part of the regard which is paid to theatrical entertainments and masquerades, so often fatal to virtue and innocence. And what societies of other persons attempt, has even been discouraged from the bench ; and the name of *informer* us'd to discountenance them, by those who would be glad to see them employ'd again in that work which once made the name justly odious. For the spirit of persecution is far from being worn out ; tho', thanks be to God, and blessed be the memory of King *William*, and the goodness of his present Majesty, it is kept from breaking out as bad or worse than ever.

This being the case, it would be strange if we could present our supplications before God *for our righteousnesses*, which I am sure we may with the prophet call *filthy rags*, Isa. lxiv. 6. and are very unfit to plead with the holy God. Confession, and crying *God be merciful*, is infinitely more proper.

And if we cannot plead merit, it is evident we have nothing else to depend upon but mercy. To this therefore let us earnestly apply, and here lay the stress of our intercessions in behalf of a sinful people. Tho' there is only an *it may be*, a *who knoweth*, *who can tell*, and no absolute security of success, yet this ought to encourage us : That God is a merciful God, his mercies are great and many ; and he may spare where we have no demand in equity, or plea from a promise. As no temporals are absolutely promised to the best, so neither are they absolutely threatned to the worst. Here is room for sovereign favour, which is precluded as to the state of souls in a future

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future world. How many hundred years did God spare the *Jews* before their utter destruction came? How long hath he spared us? And tho' we have reason to tremble, we have room to hope. But this hope will be in proportion to the nearness of the approaches we make to a general reformation. As far as we can contribute to this in our persons, families, neighbourhood and lesser societies, let us employ our selves with vigour, and extend our prayers farther than the sphere of our immediate activity. And who can tell, but it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity! Even till that time shall come, when things shall take another turn, and the abundant effusion of God's holy Spirit shall introduce a prosperous state of the Christian interest! Or, if that be not to be expected, till the end of time!

Which God of his infinite mercy grant!

F I N I S.

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